

Aug. 2, 1977

Dear B.

You said that you prepared with Richard the Asalha Puja. Would you let me know how it was? And also your Dhamma conversations with Jill? When Sarah and Ann were here I found it so encouraging for more study, it never is enough. We listened to the tape of Khun Sujin where she explains about pariññas, and we looked it up in the Visuddhimagga (Ch. XX, 1-4). While talking with others about suttas one is inspired to read more. I am going to read the 'Maha-Parinibbana-sutta' with Maud and I have found already that ^{while reading one sutta} I need many other suttas and the commentaries as well, in order to get to the meaning of matters. Which list of suttas is Richard using for his group of friends?

Now your questions. You say that not everyone has accumulations for satipaṭṭhana and that many like to practise meditation in the morning and evening in order to have calmness so that they can cope better with their problems. Although they do not develop jhāna, they seem to be calmer. You remark that most meditation practises encourage people to be kinder, and more generous. And this is always beneficial, as you say. At the same time you realise that problems in life are not just solved by calmness. You also asked how much kusala is involved in the way people practise meditation today. You find it difficult to give anybody advice on what to develop.

What should be known before one starts to 'practise' any kind of meditation? One should know what is meditation, what is calmness which is wholesome, when are kusala cittas arising and when akusala cittas, what is right understanding in samatha and what is right understanding in vipassanā and which objects do these two kinds of right understanding know. (See for this also my "Pilgrimage in Sri Lanka")

Some basic knowledge of the Abhidhamma is also indispensable for samatha I think. We should know that citta (consciousness) arises and falls away. That kusala citta (wholesome consciousness) is completely different from akusala citta (unwholesome consciousness), that akusala cittas can arise very shortly after kusala citta has fallen away. If we do not know this we mislead ourselves all the time. When the citta is kusala, there is no moha (ignorance of realities), lobha (attachment) or dosa (aversion). Moha, lobha and dosa are akusala. Even when there is slight attachment the citta is akusala. All this sounds simple in theory, but how difficult to realise it when the citta is kusala and when akusala. How soon attachment arises after kusala citta has fallen away. How difficult to know when there is moha-mūla-citta, and still, we know that there are many ^{of them} in a day.

Dear B., Aug 2, 1977

For the mental development which is samatha it is necessary to know when the citta is kusala and when it is akusala. That is why there must be right understanding accompanying the kusala citta which cultivates samatha. There can be dāna and sīla with or without paññā, but samatha cannot be without paññā, or it is not samatha. Samatha is a higher form of kusala than dāna and sīla and thus it should be encouraged, but then it must be real samatha, accompanied by right understanding.

It is difficult to have kusala citta arise, we cannot plan kusala citta. It is even more difficult to have kusala citta with paññā arise, we cannot plan it. When we sit down it does not mean that automatically kusala citta with paññā arises. When people use the word meditation they usually think of having to sit down and trying to concentrate on something. It is better to use the word bhāvanā instead of meditation. Bhāvanā is mental development, and for this paññā is indispensable. There are two kinds of bhāvanā: samatha and vipassanā. I will first say a few more things about samatha.

The right understanding in samatha has to know when the citta is kusala and when it is akusala. Very difficult indeed. It has to know what wholesome calmness is. We use the word calmness so loosely, but it has to be kusala. It is not the same as what we mean by calmness in conventional sense, where it is used so widely.

What is calmness which is kusala? When we help others the citta is kusala and it has calmness. When we abstain from killing, the citta is kusala and it has calmness. Each kusala citta has a degree of calmness. In samatha calmness is cultivated with right understanding. People in the Buddha's time had accumulations for the calmness of absorption concentration, but even if one does not have such accumulations, there can be moments of calmness in daily life, moments of samatha, also while one is working. It depends on the right understanding whether this is possible or not. Right understanding of calmness and of the object of samatha condition calmness. Not trying very hard to concentrate, then there is bound to be lobha or dosa (aversion when it is so hard.) It is right understanding which sees the disadvantages of defilements and which wants to cultivate conditions for calmness, being temporarily free from defilements. Still, we have to remember that the wholesome calmness does not stay, it arises and falls away with the citta. Since kusala citta is so rare in comparison with akusala citta, and paññā accompanying kusala citta is even rarer one should not mislead oneself into thinking that there is calmness for a long time, for example, during the time one has set aside for samatha in the morning and the evening. Misleading oneself is the worst thing one can do. One may so easily think that one cultivates

Dear B., Aug 2, 1977

3

samatha while it is not samatha at all.

For samatha there has to be right understanding of the object of meditation, whatever object among the forty (described in the Visuddhimagga) one takes. Why are there forty objects, is it not possible to make a change in this? For example, some people say that it does not matter that one is not aware of breath at the nosetip, one may be aware of the movement of the abdomen. Yes, breath is one of the most difficult subjects of meditation, it is so subtle. Most important is to think in the right way about breath, this very small matter on which our life depends. We find our life so important, our body so important, and see, it depends on this very subtle matter which is breath. If we take the movement of the abdomen instead, we miss the point. We are then busy with what? With 'my body' which is so important. It induces clinging instead of detachment from the body. But everyone should check this for himself. The more we consider the forty objects of samatha the more we see that they are meaningful, that we cannot just concentrate on anything.

It often happens that people do a kind of combination of yoga exercise and 'breath', but they do not really get what breath is. The effect: a feeling of well-being, they breathe better, more bodily health and relaxation. But this is different from calmness which is wholesome, calmness which goes together with detachment. We cannot tell whether he ^(from someone's appearance) is calm.

Calmness which accompanies kusala citta arises and falls away, it does not stay.

There are many other objects of samatha: corpses, parts of the body, recollection of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. It depends on one's accumulations which object is helpful for calmness, being away for a few moments from lobha, dosa and moha. It may happen that one moment the object is parts of the body and the next moment recollection of the Buddha. It may change from moment to moment.

Is there no concentration in samatha? There is, but it arises because of conditions. Right understanding of the object of samatha and of the way to cultivate calmness conditions the concentration which accompanies it. No need to try to concentrate. Concentration (ekaggata cetasika) arises with every citta and its quality is different according as it accompanies different types of citta. The concentration which accompanies jhānacitta is different from the concentration of citta which begins to develop samatha. But if one sits down and thinks, 'Now I must concentrate,' there is likely to be lobha or dosa. The monks in the Buddha's time who sat under the tree sat because it was natural for them. They had such accumulations for samatha, such right

Dear B., Aug. 2, 1977

understanding of calmness that it conditioned jhāna. No painful trying and forcing. Again, right understanding and the calmness which is wholesome have to be emphasized, not concentration.

People start 'meditation' because they find satipaṭṭhana too difficult. But samatha, real samatha is difficult. How much kusala is involved when people set aside time in the morning and in the evening, in order to 'meditate', was one of your questions. It depends on the citta, from moment to moment, if one tries very hard to concentrate on something one may take for kusala what is not kusala. That is not beneficial. One may spend a more fruitful time in reading about the objects of meditation in the Visuddhimagga. This is very good reading with many quotations from the scriptures. When one reads about the brahma-viharas of mettā, karuṇā, muditā and upekkhā it may remind one to practise these virtues during the day. If one does not practise them and they never arise, how can one use them as a meditation subject for calmness? One should for example know the characteristic of mettā in order that one can use it for having more and more calmness while one recollects it. Reading the suttas and studying the Abhidhamma is also very profitable if one wants to set aside a certain time for Dhamma. But it is good to remember that we cannot plan kusala. Some times it is time for dāna, at other times for sīla, for samatha or for satipaṭṭhana. While one is reading with right understanding, it is also bhavana. Certainly better than practising some kind of meditation which is not real samatha.

Some people say that when they do intensive meditation their mind is clearer and that is the result of satipaṭṭhana. The question is how. What does the right understanding of vipassanā have to know? The nāmas and the rūpas which appear right now through one of the six doors, one at a time. The paññā of vipassanā does not ^{have as object} concepts such as person, body, flower, it knows through direct experience realities such as hardness, visible object, seeing, sound or hearing. If someone thinks that he has to do intensive meditation before he can know nāmas and rūpas, it is useful to check whether one knows after this meditation seeing now, different from visible object which appears now, hearing which appears now, different from sound. The difference between nāma and rūpa has to be known through direct experience before there can be experience of their arising and falling away (which is a later stage of insight knowledge). It is already difficult to know the difference between nāma and rūpa, we all join them together. If we are quite honest with ourselves, do we know seeing as different from visible object, or do they seem to appear together? Then there is not right awareness yet.

It is not clear what is meant by intensive meditation. Is it the right practice of samatha? Right understanding of the object of samatha and right understanding of wholesome calmness? Or is it trying to concentrate with desire? Does the meditator know exactly, very precisely when the citta is kusala with paññā and when akusala citta with desire?

Samatha when it is the right practice is wholesome. But a stepping stone for vipassanā. When we read the Visuddhimagga we see that the development is described of people who have great accumulations and can cultivate jhāna before they develop vipassanā. But even so, after they emerge from jhāna they have to be mindful of nāma and rūpa, any reality which appears. This is very clearly described in the chapter about mindfulness of breathing. Nowhere in the teachings it is said that everybody must develop samatha before he develops vipassanā. If they can, it is excellent, because jhāna is a high degree of kusala. But jhāna is very difficult, only very few people can attain it, it is said in the Visuddhimagga. Also access concentration is very difficult, only very few people can make it. When there is no right understanding, one may easily mistake a kind of sensation for access concentration or for jhāna. One has to be very honest with oneself. Desire can mislead us all the time.

Before one can know, in vipassanā, through direct experience nāma as nāma and rūpa as rūpa, nāma as not self, rūpa as not self, should there not be intellectual understanding of nāma and rūpa?

If one does not know what has to be known how could one practice? In samatha the paññā knows for example mettā and it knows how to become calm with mettā. It does not know mettā as not self, calmness as not self. How could one know mettā as not self? In having first intellectual understanding of the different nāmas and rūpas which appear now, and then through direct experience of the nāma or rūpa which appears. When mettā appears, it should be known clearly as different from feeling, different from rūpa. This means that not only mettā should be known, but many different nāmas and rūpas, any reality which appears now. Thus, intellectual understanding of nāma and rūpa is necessary in any case, no matter whether one develops samatha or not.

Dāna, sīla, samatha and vipassanā are kusala kamma and all of them should be encouraged. Moments of calmness in daily life can occur when there is right understanding of that level. But, as you say, samatha does not solve the problems of our life. When there is calmness one is for that moment not entranced by the sensuous objects. But that moment falls away. Then there is seeing again, or hearing again. What happens then? We are attached to visible object, to sound, entranced by them, we take them for

Dear B., Aug. 2, 1977

something or somebody (wrong view) or we have aversion about them. We still have to cope with all the objects which appear through the six doors. Wrong view, taking realities for self causes us to have many problems 'The other person is so unpleasant to me', we keep on thinking. There are always persons and they seem to last.

If we see the disadvantages of wrong view, a distorted view of realities, we want to develop right understanding, since it is the only way to cope with our problems.

The more we see that *nāmas* and *rūpas* are only elements which arise because of conditions, the less will we believe in a self. We read in the 'Kindred Sayings' (IV, *Salāyatana-vagga*, Fourth Fifty, Ch. 3, par. 193) that Udāyin asked Ananda whether it is possible just as the body has been explained as without a self, also to explain consciousness as being without the self. Ananda said that this is possible. He asked:

'Owing to the eye and object arises eye-consciousness, does it not, friend?'

'Yes, friend.'

'Well, if the condition, if the cause of the arising of eye-consciousness should altogether, in every way, utterly come to cease without remainder, would any eye-consciousness be evident?'

'Surely not, friend.'

'Well, friend, it is by this method that the Exalted One has explained, opened up, and shown that this consciousness also is without the self.'

The same is said about tongue-consciousness and 'mind-consciousness'. Ananda then uses a simile of someone who cuts down a plaintain tree in search of heart of wood:

...Having cut it down at the root he chops it off at the top. Having done so he peels off the outer skin. But he would find no pith inside. Much less would he find heart of wood.

Even so, friend, a monk beholds no trace of the self nor what pertains to the self in the sixfold sense-sphere. So beholding, he is attached to nothing in the world. Unattached, he is not troubled. Untroubled, he is of himself utterly set free. So that he realises, "Destroyed is rebirth. Lived is the righteous life. Done is the task. For life in these conditions there is no hereafter."

Note the end: 'Unattached, he is not troubled'. No more problems. Only through *vipassanā*, mindfulness of *nāmas* and *rūpas*, problems can be solved. We have to face the objects experienced through the six doors. It does not really help to get away from them and to concentrate on a particular object of meditation.

Dear B., Aug.2, 1977

7

It is often said, vipassanā is too difficult. But samatha if it is right practice is also difficult. At least we could start with intellectual understanding of the realities which appear now, in daily life. Even intellectual understanding is helpful, in order to start thinking in the right way about our problems in daily life. What is the other person? Nāma and rūpa. What are we? Nāma and rūpa.

It is difficult to know the difference between ~~seeing~~, the experience of visible object, and the paying of attention to shape and form, which is thinking of concepts. Khun Sujin explains this time and again. We consider realities for a few moments while she is explaining, and maybe a few moments more during the day. Then the next day we still do not clearly know what visible object is, what seeing is, and we still seem to see people and things. In theory we know that we cannot see people, person is only a concept we can think about, only visible object can appear through the eye-sense. We become impatient. Isn't that crazy? How many times have we studied nāma and rūpa with awareness? Maybe just a few times and then we become impatient that we do not clearly know them as they are. We expect the impossible.

Some people when they become bored with considering seeing, visible object, hearing or sound, want to flee from them and would rather only develop samatha. This does not solve any problems. The Buddha told the monks who developed samatha: 'There is a further escape'. Samatha is not enough. (Middle Length Sayings, III, p. 78.) The Buddha asked Sariputta, who explained about samatha to a dying brahman why he had not explained to him about vipassanā (Middle Length Sayings II, p. 379).

To monks the Buddha put it very strongly that if they did not develop satipatthana, and know realities as they are, they had not attained the goal of their going forth. We read in the 'Kindred Sayings' (II, Kindred Sayings on Element, 4, par. 37) that the Buddha said to the monks:

'...There are these four elements, monks— which are the four? Earth-element, water-, heat-, air-element.

Verily, any recluses or brahmins whatever who do not understand, even as it really is, the satisfaction, the misery, the escape with regard to these four elements, they for me are not approved of among recluses as recluses nor among brahmins as brahmins, nor have those venerable ones come even in this life fully to know of themselves, to realize, to live in the attainment of, the good of being recluse or brahmin....'

Dear B., Aug.2,1977

In the following sutta the same is said about realising the arising and the ceasing of the four elements.

If one better understands, at least intellectually, how the phenomena in our life arise because of conditions and that also right understanding needs conditions and cannot be hastened, it helps one to be more patient when one does not see nāma and rūpa as they are the next day or next week. One will have more patience to consider more, to study more with awareness the different nāmas and rūpas which come r. The more one sees that this is the only way to solve the problems in one's life, the more one is motivated to study. Reading the scriptures can give us many reminders to keep on studying all phenomena which appear through the six doors, one at a time. When there is more patience there is more calmness. One will discover that also in vipassanā there is calmness. If unpleasant feeling appears, that is the reality which should be studied at that moment, as only an element, not very important, it does not belong to me. In this way one can even become calm about unpleasant feeling and about dosa! In samatha one suppresses it, in vipassanā one studies it.